

THE WASHINGTON POST

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## Rogers Plans Costa Rican OAS Trip

Secretary of State William F. Rogers will attend the foreign ministers conference of the Organization of American States in Costa Rica in April, state department sources said yesterday. Word of the trip was disclosed as the State Department denied reports that the United States has been engaged in a clandestine effort to discredit or perhaps overthrow the Costa Rican government.

Department spokesman Robert J. McCloskey said the allegations were especially puzzling because of the close and friendly relations between the two countries, particularly since President Jose Figueres' tenure in office.

[On Capitol Hill, Chairman Dante B. Fascell of the House Inter-American Affairs subcommittee said he would hold hearings to investigate the reports.]

McCloskey noted that Costa Rica has denied the reports.

Other sources noted that Rogers will attend the Foreign Ministers Conference set for San Jose, Costa Rica, beginning April 14. They said Rogers has no plans to visit any other Latin American country.

[Rogers has two other trips scheduled this Spring. He is expected to attend a meeting of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) in London from April 28 to May 1, to be followed immediately by a conference of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in Ankara on May 3.]

CRC, 3/17/2003

8 MAR 1971

## **COSTA RICA** **Freelance Diplomacy**

In Costa Rica's admirable if not entirely unblemished history of democratic government, no figure stands taller than diminutive (5 ft. 3 in.), scrappy José Figueres Ferrer, 64. At the head of a ragtag band of rebels in 1948, "Don Pepe" routed a Communist military coalition that had tried to seize power illegally. He banned the Communist party, abolished the army (Costa Rica has not had one since), instituted many social reforms and, after 18 months, restored power to the elected President. Figueres was elected to the presidency in his own right in 1953 and again last year. Educated at M.I.T. and married to an American, he became an outspoken supporter of the U.S. Opponents frequently charged, in fact, that he was too pro-Yankee.

With that sort of record, Pepe Figueres seems a most unlikely target for a Guatemala-style plot engineered by CIA agents and aimed at his overthrow. Yet that is precisely what Costa Rican officials claim has happened in the tiny (pop. 1,700,000) Central American republic. They do not accuse Washington of sponsoring the scheme, but they make no secret of their suspicions about some officials who happened to be working for the U.S.

**Astonishing Question.** The plot began to take shape in 1968, when one Earl J. Williamson was assigned to the American embassy in San José as a political officer. Williamson, 55, also served as CIA station chief. While he was attached to the U.S. embassy in Havana during the Batista era, he had married the vivacious niece of a wealthy Cuban sugar baron. The Williamsons moved in wealthy San José circles, where Pepe Figueres was considered a "Communist" by some because of his social reforms. Williamson and his wife made no effort to hide their dislike for the President—particularly after Don Pepe, having already established relations with Rumania, Bulgaria and Hungary, moved to exchange ambassadors with the Soviet Union as well. (Costa Rica has been selling its surplus coffee to the Russians for U.S. dollars for two years.)

Last October the Costa Rican government received intelligence reports that Williamson was actively abetting a right-wing antigovernment plot. The State Department was asked to quietly arrange his transfer. Nothing was done.

Shortly after New Year's, Costa Rican Ambassador to Washington Rafael A. Zúñiga visited Assistant Secretary of State Charles Meyer and bluntly asked: "Is the U.S. plotting the overthrow of Don Pepe?" Meyer expressed

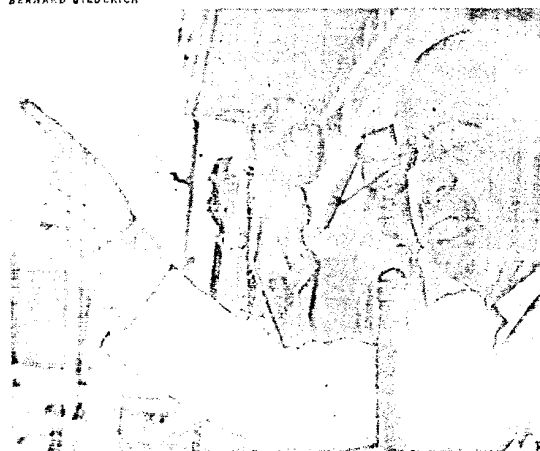
Department Troubleshooter C. Allan Stewart was dispatched to San José. Still Williamson was not recalled.

Fully expecting a coup in early January, Figueres' government put the 3,000-man civil guard on full alert. Contingency plans called for Figueres to be whisked to the hills to protect him from assassination. The coup did not come off, but the following week San José once again requested Williamson's recall. Last week the CIA man and his wife finally departed. At the same time, Ambassador Walter C. Ploeser, a conservative former insurance executive, began cutting the AID program's personnel and trimming the Peace Corps (though Costa Ricans wanted it expanded). He also says he plans to boost security personnel to maintain surveillance of the Russians when they come.

**Overzealous Actions.** Washington sources suggest that Figueres engineered the whole plot story to get rid of Williamson and Ploeser, a Nixon appointee. Don Pepe is, after all, an emotional man; only two weeks ago, he slapped a student for razzing him.

In Washington, Williamson was ordered to make no comment on the situation. Ploeser may indeed be recalled before long—but at Foggy Bottom's

BERNARD DIEDERICH



FIGUERES AFTER 1970 VICTORY  
A most unlikely target.

pleasure, not Don Pepe's. And a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee, after a closed hearing, found no evidence that the U.S. Government had "attempted to overthrow" the Figueres government, although it did cite "overzealous actions" by unnamed officials.

One U.S. embassy official in San José blamed the Administration's exceptionally low profile in Latin America for the diplomatic debacle. "We are floating in the policy of no policy," he said, "and a lot of guys start to freelance." To raise the profile a bit, Secretary of State William Rogers will be going to San José next month to attend the Latin American Foreign Ministers conference. For his part, Don Pepe has asked the Russians, who were scheduled to open their embassy this week, to put

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1838 : DIPLOMAT (2270)

WASHINGTON, FEB. 9, REUTER - THE STATE DEPARTMENT TODAY DENIED REPORTS THAT THE CIA WAS INVOLVED IN AN ATTEMPTED COUP AGAINST THE COSTA RICAN GOVERNMENT OF PRESIDENT JOSE FIGUEROA. DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN FORBES D. MCCLOSKEY ALSO DENIED REPORTS THAT COSTA RICAN PRESIDENT FIGUEROA HAD ORDERED A SPANISH DIPLOMAT TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY.

REPORTS OF CIA INVOLVEMENT IN THE ATTEMPTED COUP LAST MONTH APPEARED IN NEWSPAPERS IN COSTA RICA, ONE OF THE MOST STABLE DEMOCRACIES IN LATIN AMERICA.

"NO AGENCY OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN ACTIVITIES AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT OF COSTA RICA, (AND) ...THE GOVERNMENT IN COSTA RICA HAS DENIED IT HAS DECLARED ANY AMERICAN OFFICIAL PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT," MCCLOSKEY SAID.

A MIAMI NEWSPAPER REPORTED LATELY THAT THE POLITICAL OFFICER AT THE U.S. EMBASSY IN SAN JOSE, DAVID J. WILLIAMSON, WAS ASKED TO LEAVE COSTA RICA BECAUSE OF CONTACTS WITH OPPOSITION POLITICAL LEADERS.

OFFICIALS HERE SAID WILLIAMSON WAS SCHEDULED TO BE ASSIGNED TO ANOTHER POST AS OF FEB. 15, BUT THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN PLANNED BEFORE THE ALLEGED CIA INVOLVEMENT ALLEGATIONS. REUTER FOR AP/RL

12 FEB 1971

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Exclusive statement from Costa Rica

## Figueres denies break with U.S.

By VIRGINIA PREWETT

COSTA RICA'S President Jose Figueres, in an exclusive statement, informs me, there is no truth to wide spread rumors of a serious break in relations between his country and our government.

One specific rumor is that our CIA was caught plotting to overthrow him because he allegedly has gone "soft" on communism. "Don Pepe" — as many call him — happens to be the only Latin American president who has actually led liberal forces to victory over communists in a military test.

President Figueres told me in a message phoned from San Jose at my request that there is "nothing to" reports of a U.S.-Costa Rican estrangement. He said he and his foreign minister, Gonzalo Facio, had dinner this week "most cordially" with our Ambassador Walter Ploeser, whose recall Don Pepe was rumored to have requested.

President Figueres said he is planning a well-publicized trip with Ambassador Ploeser to visit the Turrialba Agricultural Institute, to contradict rumors. His ambassador to Washington, Rafael A. Zuniger, was intermediary in the phone exchange.

## RUMOR IN SAN JOSE

The Costa Rican president admitted that "unpleasant rumors" have been rife in San Jose since December. Rep. Dante Fascell, D-Fla., heard them on his visit there two weeks ago — and heard them downgraded. But when they burst into the Latin American press this week, both he and Sen. Frank Church, chairman of our Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on the Hemisphere, deplored any possibility that our government might bring strong pressure against President Figueres.

Rep. Fascell, now unfortunately hospitalized with a broken arm, very properly asked the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Inter-American Affairs, of which he is chairman, to invite Assistant Secretary of State Charles A. Meyer and his deputy, Robert Hurwitch, to brief it in a closed session on Feb. 11.

What transpires is that there was no plot, but some overzealous pressure by two members of Ambassador Ploeser's San Jose staff

against Don Pepe's new commercial relations with communist countries. There apparently is a division of viewpoint within the U.S. embassy staff.

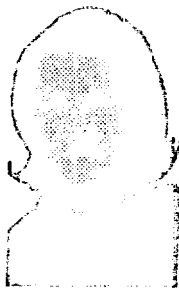
## CIA GETS INTO IT

By the time behind-scenes disagreements in this area went thru the rumor mills, First Secretary Earle Williamson of our San Jose embassy was accused of being a CIA agent plotting to overthrow Don Pepe. Mr. Williamson has received orders to move to another post.

This rumor is so damaging to both the CIA and to the U.S. that it could not be contained. It has been propagated by Don Pepe's foes as well as his friends.

The situation is loaded with irony. Brazil, Columbia and other Latin American governments have made barter and other deals with Russia without such incidents. Don Pepe's conservative predecessor in the presidency actually began the new commercial deals with Russia.

Also, President Figueres and his Foreign Minister Gonzalo Casro as the father of political terrorism now shaking many countries. And rarely a week goes by without a verbal assault over the air-waves from Fidel Castro against Don Pepe, charging him of plotting to invade Cuba — with help from the CIA.



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*Press Item for the DCI*

Date 11 Feb 71  
Item No. 22  
Ref: No.

GOODWIN

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(COSTA RICA)

WASHINGTON--THE STATE DEPARTMENT ANNOUNCED TODAY THAT EARL WILLIAMSON, REPUTED CIA AGENT SAID TO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN AN ALLEGED PLOT AGAINST PRESIDENT JOSE FIGUERES OF COSTA RICA, WAS RETURNING TO WASHINGTON NEXT MONTH.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT WAS MADE BY STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN ROBERT J. MCCLOSKEY. HE DECLINED TO SPECULATE ON THE REASONS FOR WILLIAMSON'S RECALL.

BOTH THE U.S. AND THE COSTA RICAN GOVERNMENT HAVE DENIED ANY INVOLVEMENT BY EITHER THE U.S. EMBASSY IN SAN JOSE OR THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY (CIA) IN AN ALLEGED PLOT TO OVERTHROW PRESIDENT FIGUERES.

2-11--TS350PES

Comment Goodwin, Maury and CSDO have copies.

These comments represent the initial and tentative reaction of the Office of Current Intelligence to the attached item from the news services.

11 FEB 1971

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# U.S. Recalls C.I.A. Chief in Costa Rica

By BENJAMIN WELLES

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 10 —

The United States is quietly withdrawing from Costa Rica, Earl Williamons, its Central Intelligence Agency station chief there, in a compromise move to placate President Jose Figueres Ferrer.

Mr. Williamson's impending transfer after two and a half years — a relatively brief tour of duty for Central Intelligence Agency personnel overseas — follows press charges with the C.I.A. was involved in "rumors of an attempt to overthrow" President Figueres.

After a private briefing today by Charles Appleton Meyer, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee declared that there was "no foundation for the charge that the United States Government had been involved in any attempt to overthrow the Government of President Figueres." It noted that "Mr. Figueres, himself, denied the evidence of any coup or involvement."

## 'Personality Conflicts'

The head of the subcommittee, Representative John S. Monagan, Democrat of Connecticut, attributed the widespread publicity in the Latin American press and in *The Miami Herald* to "personality conflicts" between United States Ambassador Walter C. Ploeser, a political appointee, and his embassy staff and to "overzealous actions" by some United States officials, whom he did not name.

President Figueres said in a telephone interview yesterday that the accusations against Mr. Williamson and his C.I.A. station had come from people in Costa Rica "who never could prove it." He denied allegations of United States complicity in a plot and said that he and Mr. Ploeser "are on very good terms."

President Figueres said that Mr. Williamson and his Cuban wife held political views "distinct from that of the Government, but that's their privilege." Other sources said that Mr. Williamson had expressed disapproval of the Figueres Government's plans to renew diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. A Soviet mission to Costa Rica would be the first in Central America.

"This diplomatic recognition in no way shakes our loyalty to the United States or to the democratic cause," Mr. Figueres said. "People everywhere are

tired of the cold war. Russia controls half of Europe, and we want to make the Russians drink coffee instead of tea."

In the past two years the Soviet Union has bought \$10-million worth of coffee from Costa Rica, a country of 1.6 million people with an average annual income of \$600. This economic offensive has created widespread divisions in Costa Rica and has also disturbed United States officials.

Secretary of State William P. Rogers is due to attend a hemisphere meeting of foreign ministers at San Jose, Costa Rica, on April 14.

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JOURNAL

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL

Thursday - 11 February 1971

25X1

25X1A

1. [ ] Met with Representative Robert McClory (R., Ill.) in response to his inquiry concerning the application of a former Agency employee, [ ] as a secretary on his staff. I informed him that her record was entirely favorable and that she had applied for reemployment and will probably be rehired should she accept. He stated he would probably offer Miss O'Brien the job and let her decide which job she wanted. Coordinated with Personnel and Security and verified her past employment which was completely favorable.

25X1

25X1C

2. [ ] I left a suggested reply with Miss Margaret Stack, in the office of Representative Joseph Minish (D., N.J.), concerning the request for assistance to locate the brother of a constituent. I informed her that appropriate inquiries had been conducted with the Agency and Air America and that the brother of the constituent was not associated with either organization. I explained the wording in the suggested reply and Miss Stack stated she understood and the letter to the constituent would be phrased accordingly.

25X1A

[ ]  
[ ]  
Mr. Reid seemed to appreciate our problem and offered to try to be helpful in resolving it. See Memo for Record.

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25X1A

4. [ ] Accompanied [ ] WH Division, to brief Pat Holt, Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff, in response to his request for information about recent developments in Costa Rica and possible Agency involvement therein. Mr. Holt apparently accepted our assurances that despite press reports to the contrary the Agency was in no way involved in any plot against President Figueres. See [ ] Memo for Record.

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## JOURNAL

### OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL

Wednesday - 10 February 1971

25X1

1. [ ] Joan Spaulding, in the office of Representative Ogden R. Reid (R., N.Y.), called to ask if Mr. Reid could be briefed tomorrow on the problem of our Radios. After checking with Cord Meyer, I called back to say that Mr. Meyer and I would meet with Mr. Reid at 3:00 p.m.

25X1

[ ] Called Pat Holt, Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff, and in view of Mr. Holt's tight schedule agreed that we would postpone our briefing on Costa Rica until tomorrow at 11:00 a.m.

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3. [ ] Mr. J. Sourwine, Chief Counsel, Senate Subcommittee on Internal Security, called to request a copy

25X1C

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25X1A

4. [ ] Mrs. Ludden, Representative Robert McClory's (R., Ill.) office, called to verify the prior Agency employment of [ ] who was applying for a secretarial job on the Representative's staff. I informed her that our records would be reviewed and she will be advised shortly.

25X1

5. [ ] Mrs. Susan Hamilton, Office of Representative Peter Frelinghuysen (R., N.J.), called advising receipt of a letter from a constituent which severely criticized CIA. The letter posed many questions as to funding, congressional oversight, etc. Mrs. Hamilton did not feel that the letter warranted referral to us for reply and sought guidance as to how to handle it. It sufficed if we would furnish her with a copy of our standard publication on the Agency which she would send to the constituent. She did not feel it necessary that we prepare a suggested reply.

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